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TITLE PAGE

E-mentoring as a HRD intervention: an exploratory action research study within an International Professional Mentoring Scheme

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Contribution to HRD International

The rise of e-communication has opened up the possibility of global mentoring relationships (GMRs). GMRs have potential to be highly effective in enhancing professional learning and providing opportunities for career development. However, there are many factors which interact to influence the degree of success of these GMRs. Without a clearer understanding of the critical interplay between these factors the potential benefits of these GMRs may be unrealised. This paper presents empirical findings from an international e-mentoring scheme which has implications for both theory and practice. For HRD practitioners, the paper provides an overview of the key concepts of traditional and e-mentoring, highlighting challenges and key areas for attention when introducing e-mentoring schemes and GMRs. For HRD researchers, the paper offers empirical evidence of stages of mentoring and key elements for success in mentoring relationships, particularly GMRs.

(136 words)

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Abstract

Advances in technology have reshaped mentoring as a human resource development (HRD) intervention and heralded e-mentoring using online solutions as an alternative to traditional mentoring. This article reports on a unique learning opportunity as a part of the HRD curriculum in a Higher Education Institution (HEI) in which mentoring was offered with pairs separated by not only geographical distance but also by time zone, culture and organisation (Global Mentoring Relationships, GMRs). This empirical study uses an action research approach to aid the programme team's understanding of their own practice and to evaluate 23 GMRs within an e-mentoring scheme in a UK based university. The aim of this paper is to report the evolution of the GMRs and identify benefits and challenges to inform the practice of human resource development (HRD). Key findings highlight the factors that influence the evolution of the e-mentoring relationships, e-mentoring functions and style, mode of communication and contributions of e-mentoring to career development and learning in an international context. The paper recommends a combination of e-mentoring methods using various forms of technology and the sharing of models to create a common language to enhance the practice of e-mentoring in and across organisations.

(196 words)

Keywords: mentoring; e-mentoring; learning; personal development; human resource development

Introduction

Much has been written on the subject of mentoring and the consensus is that successful mentoring is a highly effective HRD intervention as it enhances personal and career development (Headlam-Wells 2005). Kram (1985) highlighted that protégés benefit from mentoring relationships where the mentor, as the more experienced person, helps and supports the professional development of the less experienced protégé. In the corporate world, mentoring is widely used as an HRD intervention as it can be regarded as a source of competitive advantage (Garavan 2007, Pfeffer 2005, Torraco & Swanson 1995). In the context of Higher Education, mentoring programmes can be instrumental in helping students explore their strengths and weaknesses, increase motivation and to gain access to organisational knowledge and networking opportunities (Klasen & Clutterbuck 2004, Harris 2013).

Globalisation and e-communication have opened up the possibility of mentoring relationships that cross the boundaries of time, geography and culture. Traditional face-to-face mentoring is not always practical in a knowledge society where communication is instant, computer mediated and global (Bierema & Hill, 2005). Therefore, e-mentoring or virtual mentoring has now been recognised as an alternative to traditional mentoring and the internet is being used as a medium for multiple types and forms of communication to build and develop mentoring relationships which can reach across borders and erode barriers that exist in traditional mentoring programmes (Bierema & Merriam, 2002; Bierema & Hill 2005; Zey, 2011).

However, even as mentoring becomes more accessible and more widely-used in business, industry and education (Hopkins, 2005), there is still a gap in understanding the complexities of this developmental relationship between a mentor and a mentee. Although there is no doubt that mentoring offers an unique learning opportunity for personal growth and career development, there is need for more empirical research that quantifies the benefits, effectiveness and overall impact of mentoring (Wanberg, Welsh & Hezlett, 2003; Egan & Sing, 2008; Thurston, D'Abate & Eddy, 2012). Moreover, there is a specific gap in the literature on inter-organisational e-mentoring schemes as most empirical studies are either of in-house, intra-organisational programmes (Kram, 1983; Mullen, 1994; Harris, 2013; Jones, 2013; Holtbrugge & Ambrosius, 2015) or of e-mentoring studies focusing on youth programmes where mentor-mentee association is conducted through an online website (DiRenzo, Linnehan, Shao & Rosenberg, 2009; Shpigelman, Weiss, & Reiter, 2009). Hence,

although it has been established that mentoring in general works, there is a gap in the literature in terms of why, when and how it works, particularly within an e-mentoring scheme where the mentors-mentees relationships are defined by international separation. This article aims to address this gap by examining the factors that influence the evolution of a Global Mentoring Relationship (GMR) and to identify the benefits and challenges of e-mentoring within an international inter-organisational context. The paper will add to the literature on mentoring which will benefit both the HRD practitioner and academic communities

This study reports on research into 23 mentor-mentee relationships within an e-mentoring scheme in a UK based university. The e-mentoring scheme is aimed at enhancing students' learning experience and supporting their personal and career development. This scheme specifically sought to engage post graduate students as mentees seeking to learn about human resource (HR) practices in an international context. The paper will begin with a review of the literature on definitions, models and frameworks of mentoring and e-mentoring. It will then evaluate the role of mentoring in the HEI curriculum before outlining the methods used to research the participants' experiences. Next it will report on the participants' perceived benefits and challenges of the e-mentoring relationships, highlighting factors impacting positively and negatively on the relationships. It will conclude with brief discussion of the implications for theory, practice and for further research.

Literature review

Discussions on the process of mentoring, the role of a mentor, and mentoring programmes in organisations are not new and most make reference to the role played by the mythical Greek character, Mentor, from whom the process takes its name. There are many definitions of mentoring in the literature and the concept can be understood in different ways. A number of common themes appear to characterise the literature on and research into mentoring and e-mentoring. These centre on purpose, type, mode, and phases of mentoring. These are reviewed with emphasis on e-mentoring along with a discussion of mentoring in the context of Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

Mentoring defined

Mentoring is seen by some as primarily help and support to maximise potential and enhance career (Kram, 1985; Levinson, 1987; Parsloe, 1999); by others as providing a more experienced, perhaps elevated organisational perspective or 'overseeing role' through sharing

experiences, views and stories (Zey 1984; Ragins, 1999; Wanberg, Welsh & Hezlett, 2003; Jones, 2013) whilst some emphasise the assistance in the transition and development of an individual as they change from one role into another (Wallace & Gravels, 2007; Clutterbuck & Ragins, 2002). The literature makes a general differentiation between sponsorship mentoring (Kram 1985) which is considered to be a US approach and developmental mentoring (Clutterbuck, 1998) which is more commonly applied in Europe. However, in practice a sponsorship mentoring approach may in some instances result in deep learning and development which typically has career impact as mentees gains greater clarity about who they are and what they want (Clutterbuck, 2015).

Due to these variations in definitions and functions the intended purpose of mentoring is not always clear (Bierema & Merriam, 2003). This probably contributes to the widely differing degrees of formality, structure and effectiveness associated with mentoring schemes. At one extreme there are the overly bureaucratic schemes dominated by administrative procedures; at the other extreme is the 'light touch' approach in which aims, objectives or strategic relevance are poorly developed or articulated and outcomes rarely pursued for the purpose of evaluation. However, what is not in doubt is that mentoring is a developmental relationship in which experience and knowledge are passed from one party, the mentor, to another party, the mentee, with the general consensus that successful mentoring enhances learning and is highly effective in enhancing career development (Kram & Isabella, 1985; Dreher & Cox 1996; Hezlett, 2005; Apospori, Nikandrou & Panayotopoulou, 2006).

Evolution, functions and styles in mentoring – models and frameworks

The literature on mentoring highlights the development and potential value of conceptual models of mentoring. Some of these relate to stage, some to styles and others to skills for successful mentoring.

Conceptual models and frameworks have been offered relating to the phases of a mentor relationship (Kram 1983; Mirriam, 1983; Zachary, 2000) and the factors that influence the perceptions and degree of success of a mentor-mentee relationship (Clutterbuck, 1998, 2004; Eby *et al*, 2005). These suggest that once started the mentoring relationships tend to follow a common pathway or evolution. One 4-stage model of relationship development based on empirical study of 18 mentor-mentee relationships, illustrates evolution through initiation, cultivation, separation and redefinition (Kram, 1983) though the phases are not entirely

distinct. Three mentoring phases (initiation, development and termination) are suggested by Mirriam (1983) with emphasis on building rapport, developing professional growth and then a shift to the mentor becoming a friend, a counsellor and a resource person as the relationship moved through these phases. Zachary (2000) describes four similar developmental stages: preparing, negotiating, enabling and closing the relationship. Another 4-stage model (Clutterbuck, 1995, 1998), suggests stages evolving over time relating to the variable of the 'intensity of learning' during the relationship: rapport-building (getting to know each other, deciding if the relationship will work); direction (creating a sense of purpose for meeting); progress-making (working together to achieve the relationship goals), and winding down or final closure, recognising that the formal relationship needs to come to an end at some point.

More recently, an empirical qualitative study in a HEI context suggests that the mentoring phases in a HEI programme do not differ significantly from the Kram and the Clutterbuck frameworks (Westland, 2015). However, the importance of an additional pre-mentoring phase is suggested, allowing participants to have prior understanding of their roles and responsibilities within the mentoring relationship.

Literature also highlights the difference in the type and style of mentoring. Situational mentoring provides a range of potential styles which a mentor can adopt at different points depending on the degree and balance between influence (directive or non-directive) and emotional or intellectual challenge needed to support the mentee (Clutterbuck, 1998). This model enables the mentoring relationship to derive its effectiveness from flexibly combining elements of four other one-to-one development approaches: coach, counsellor, networker/facilitator and guardian. Another type of support in the relationship is the knowledge transmission function of the mentoring relationship, framed as a two-way 'information exchange model' which reflects the reciprocal nature of the exchange between the mentors and their protégés (Mullen, 1994). Finally, to ensure that each mentor-mentee exchange delivers optimum value both mentor and mentee need to ensure a high 'clarity of purpose' built on a foundation of 'high rapport'; this can be a factor influencing the 'success' of the relationship (Clutterbuck, 2001).

In this study, we have applied Clutterbuck's (1998, 2001) conceptual models on the 'stages', 'styles' and 'success' of mentoring within the training provision for both the mentors and the mentees to build a common language and a shared understanding of the

process, style and purpose. These models were then used as evaluation tools to assess and appraise the phases of the GMRs as well as the factors that contributed to the effectiveness of the mentor-mentee relationships.

Mode of communication – e-mentoring

Another theme emerging from the literature review relates to the mode or medium of communication, in particular the influence of Information Communication Technology (ICT) and its adoption for the purpose of mentoring. The rapid evolution of ICT has been seized, in some cases without question, as a way of extending the process of mentoring to overcome spatial and temporal divides. However much debate has ensued regarding whether the gains of such ICT exist in the absence of any costs.

Whether referred to as e-mentoring (Bierema & Merriam, 2002; Shpigelman *et al*, 2009; Hamilton & Scandura, 2003), virtual mentoring (Bierema & Hill, 2005; Zey, 2011) or instant mentoring (An & Lipscomb, 2010), one significant gain is that access to mentoring is potentially increased for those who might previously have been disenfranchised through increased availability of ICT. Claims that e-mentoring ‘is a computer mediated, mutually beneficial relationship between a mentor and a protégé which provides learning, advice, encouragement, promoting and modelling that is often boundary less, egalitarian and qualitatively different from face-to-face mentoring’ (Bierema & Merriam, 2002, p 214 p) are supported by claims that using asynchronous email to communicate has been adopted by an increasing number of organisations with global reach because of its practical advantage for geographically distant mentoring pairs (Hall, 2005). Therefore, advances in technology and embracing of e-communication have opened up possibilities of mentoring relationships outside of the traditional face-to-face mode. This has led to an explosion of online mentoring websites and opportunities across a wide variety of professions (Ensher, Heun & Blanchard, 2003).

Benefits and challenges of e-mentoring

E-mentoring should not be regarded as an inferior substitute to face-to-face mentoring; “it is simply a different approach to mentoring and can be effective – and in some cases, potentially more effective - than traditional mentoring” (Clutterbuck 2001, p156). The strengths of e-mentoring include (as discussed earlier) overcoming the challenge of global organisational structures by allowing mentors in different places and different time zones to

communicate either synchronously or asynchronously (Scandura & Hamilton, 2003). Furthermore, the removal of some of the visual status cues which sometimes inhibit communication between the more senior or experienced mentor and the less experienced mentee can be an advantage, along with the “elimination of noise due to personal bias” (Cardow 1998, p 35) as a further benefit of e-mentoring. The overall findings from a study on the role of e-mentoring in protégés’ learning and satisfaction support this view as in large scale e-mentoring programmes such as MentorNet in which a protégé separated by physical and time distance have still received the intended benefits of mentoring from his or her mentor (de Janasz, & Godshalk, 2013). Another online e-mentoring programme for women’s development highlighted that it reduced feelings of isolation, widened networking opportunities and enabled access to a wide variety of resources on the web (Headlam-Wells, Gosland & Craig, 2005). There are also suggestions that virtual mentoring has the potential to better support a multicultural workforce by providing wider access to mentoring (Bierema & Hill, 2005). Rowland (2012) also points out that in an e-mentoring environment the issue of disparity is erased. The medium of technology can also act as a shield by rendering physical or visible disparities neutral (Shpigelman *et al*, 2009) and thereby offer greater flexibility in creating mutually beneficial mentoring relationship.

Several challenges to e-mentoring, both perceived and actual are also highlighted in the literature. Cost, reliability and compatibility of technology and the total dependency on electronic technology are just some of the issues raised (Bierema & Hill, 2005). A key process in any mentoring programme is matching of pairs; however without any face to face opportunity to build rapport this process is put at risk. Even if this risk is mitigated, once underway the absence of physical body language or facial expression cues represents a challenge to both parties not least in the increased expectation of precise articulation via written online communication. Therefore, virtual intimacy may be difficult to obtain, particularly if the mentor and mentee have never met in person (Bierema & Merrian 2002, Zey 2011). Purcell (2004) offers advice for making e-mentoring more effective by initially developing the mentoring relationship in person or by phone. Finally, finding ways to sustain the relationship may be another challenge (Brown, 2001) as miscommunication can occur on a number of levels in e-mentoring if both parties are not conscientious about making quick responses to requests for information or advice (Bierema & Merrian 2002). Sustaining momentum and engagement between sessions - the challenge of the downtime - has to be anticipated (Bierema & Merrian, 2002; Zey, 2011), with studies showing that development of

relationships through online mentoring and computer mediated communication are usually slower than face-to-face mentoring (Ensher *et al*, 2003) and practical challenges due to unfamiliarity or incompatibility with technology have to be addressed on web based online mentoring programmes (Williams, Sunderman & Kim, 2012). Hence, reliance upon technology to overcome physical distance (a ‘virtual wall’) between a mentor and protégé must be balanced with the offer of protective capacities or a shield, neutralising certain disparities (Shpigelman *et al*, 2009).

Therefore if we acknowledge from the themes discussed above that e-mentoring is far from identical to traditional face-to-face mentoring then in order to effectively implement e-mentoring a systemic and structured approach, with focused attention on the need for mentors and mentees to have clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities through effective training as well as on-going support, is required (Bierema & Hill, 2005, Westland, 2015). Frequency of interactions, familiarity with the internet and motivation to participate will also positively relate to the programme outcome and satisfaction of mentees (DiRenzo *et al*, 2009). These key issues were fully considered in the design, development and implementation of the e- mentoring programme under study. Also, most if not all empirical studies on mentoring focus on in-house, intra-organisational programmes (Kram, 1985; Fowler & O’Gorman, 2005; Hezlett, 2005, Eby, Lockwood & Butts 2005), business mentoring through internet (Cardow, 1998) or online computer mediated programmes (Ensher *et al*, 2003; Headlam-Wells *et al*, 2005; Shpigelman *et al*, 2009; Williams *et al*, 2012; de Janasz & Godshalk, 2013). This study will offer an alternative context – an international, inter-organisational e-mentoring programme, using skype, email and telephone as main mode of communication rather than an purely online web based mentoring programme to develop GMRs.

E- Mentoring as a HRD intervention in Higher Education

The final theme in the literature is the use of mentoring in the context of Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs). HEIs have started to embed not only academic mentoring to improve academic and scholarly achievements of their students (Tenenbaum, Crosby & Gliner, 2001; Clark, Harden & Johnson, 2000), but also professional or business mentoring (Dutton, 2003) where a student has the opportunity to engage with a ‘mentor’ who has experience to support them to improve their understanding of organisational practice and, where possible provide opportunities for networking with a view to enhancing career development. Employers are

expecting not only disciplinary understanding but also additional ‘soft’ skills such as metacognition and efficacy beliefs from graduates. Therefore, education providers now focus not only on qualifications targets, but also recognise their role in addressing this ‘added value’ within the Higher Education experience. Most HEIs now articulate their provision for extracurricular activities such as mentoring to support students in preparing for the world of work.

A comparative study of mentoring functions within education and industry (Ghosh, 2012) highlights the multidimensional nature of a mentoring relationship. In education, a mentor may play several roles ranging from being a role model to a counsel, teacher, guide and a friend (Anderson & Shannon, 1988). In business mentoring, the mentor also plays multiple roles that serve the overarching purposes of supporting both career and psychosocial development of the mentee (Fowler & O’Gorman, 2005). It is the supportive function identified by Ghosh (2012) of sponsoring and advocating role of a business mentor that is particularly relevant to this study as the scheme was designed and implemented as a part of HRD curriculum in a HEI context, offering mentoring support to post-graduate students for both better understanding of organisational practices as well as career development guidance and networking opportunity

Research Methods

Sample and setting

The mentees in this e-mentoring scheme included both international and UK-based students seeking to place their learning in the context of international organisational practices to develop ‘a global mind-set and global competencies’ (Diamond, Walkley, Forbes, Hughes & Sheen, 2011). This research project was developed in response to the university’s alumni feedback in India that identified the value that a mentor could add to the student experience. It was also a response to students’ need to access wider work experience opportunities in the wake of changes to international student visas, experienced by all Higher Educational Institutes (HEIs). The scheme recruited and engaged with mentors who are human resource (HR) practitioners in multi-national organisations in India from a range of disparate sectors. Therefore, these participants were not aligned and directed to a common organisational goal or performance criteria for career development within a particular organisational context. The scheme did not apply an online mentoring programme through a website which is now common practice, particularly in educational context. Rather, the mentors committed to

providing up to ten hours of mentoring to one student over a period of 3 to 4 months mainly by telephone, Skype or email to share their experience of HR and wider professional networks with a view to increasing the student's understanding of practice and thereby enhancing their learning and career opportunities. Within the scheme, the mentors were supported by on-line training material including a mentor toolkit and the mentees attended a workshop which focused on the skills and behaviours that contribute to a successful mentor-mentee relationship. Clutterbuck's (1998, 2001) models on 'stages', 'styles' and 'success' of mentoring discussed earlier formed part of the content for this training/learning material. The mentor-mentee matching was based on personal preferences of industry, sector or previous educational background. As recommended by Klasen & Clutterbuck (2004) individual mentoring pairs were then given the freedom to build and develop their relationships with support available from programme manager as required.

Data and approach

Our study applied action research involving a circle of planning, action and fact-finding about the result of the action (Lewin 1946) offering descriptions, explanations and analyses of action to share knowledge and the learning that led to the creation of that knowledge (McNiff & Whitehead, 2009). This pragmatic approach using participatory action research is particularly suitable in evaluating, developing and improving practices in HRD interventions, such as mentoring and e-mentoring (Collins, Lewis, Stracke & Vanderheide, 2014; Laukhuf & Malone, 2015)

The primary source of data was a series of mentor and mentee progress update questionnaires with follow up interviews with mentors and mentees to evaluate the progress of the relationships at various stages of the relationship. A second data set was generated at the conclusion of the programme through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with the mentors and mentees and a mentee focus group captured further insights into experience and best practice, as well as challenges and barriers. Finally, the voices of other stakeholders such as the project team, module tutors of mentees were heard through semi structured interviews.

Table 1: Overview of informants

	April 2012 to July 2012	January 2013 to April 2013
Mentors	13	10
Mentees	13	10
Project team	2	2
Module tutors	4	4
Director of Programme	2	2

The inquiry adopted a mixed-method approach (Flavian & Kass, 2015; Ruru, Sanga, Walker & Ralph, 2013) generating and collating both quantitative and qualitative data sets. This facilitated a degree of methodological triangulation, insofar as it enabled the authors to develop a more detailed picture of each mentor-mentee relationship. The transcripts of the interviews and focus groups were analysed and the data from the questionnaires independently and then agreed on common codes. A simple colour coding and numbering process was used to highlight key words and comments of mentors and mentees. This simple manual coding process was effective in drawing out the ‘stage’ and ‘success’ of each relationship which was the main focus of the research inquiry. Each relationship was tracked and all participants contributed sufficiently throughout the evaluate process. The mentor-mentee perspectives were analysed at various stages of the relationship, giving equal weight to both viewpoints. Where necessary, semi-structured interviews were used to seek clarity and validate final research conclusions. The manual coding and thematic process, based on the mentoring literature allowed a degree of investigator triangulation (King and Horrocks, 2010). We have addressed problems associated with common method biases by applying reflexivity as a key element which involved being alert at all times to human subjective processes in undertaking this research, with the self-awareness that knowledge is relative to their own perspective (Potter and Wetheral, 1987; Edwards and Potter, 1992). Respondents were assured anonymity and confidentiality and encouraged to respond honestly

It must be noted that the multi-cultural aspect of the mentoring relationships was not considered within this study as none of the mentors and mentees identify ‘diversity’ as an issue within their individual relationships.

Results & discussions

This section reports on the evolution of the GMRs and benefits and challenges faced by participants during the course of the e-mentoring relationships and seek to distil a range of factors influencing e-mentoring relationships.

Evolution of the GMRs

Our study draws on the models on phases of mentoring relationship (Missrian, 1982; Kram, 1983; Clutterbuck, 1998). We specifically applied Clutterbuck’s conceptual model of evolution of mentoring relationship to analyse the nature and the progress of relationship of individual pairs in this study as it fitted the expected duration of this mentoring scheme better than Kram’s 4-stage phases which stretch over a period of 2 to 5 years. Following the introductory emails between mentees and mentors, the relationship building stage progressed at a different pace for each pair. Of the 23 matches, 8 reached maturity (7 to 10 hours of communication), 6 relationships moved between rapport building and direction and did not move to ‘progress’ stage (3 to 6 hours of communication) and 7 relationships struggled at the rapport building stage (30 to 45 minutes) with 1 or 2 conversations either by email or on the phone and did not progress much further. Two matches struggled to make any further contact following the initial introductory emails. Figure 1 identifies the different stages of the mentoring relationship in the study based on the ‘intensity of learning’ as presented in the primary data.

Figure 1: The Evolution of the Mentoring Relationship

Intensity of learning	High (learning exchange – face-to-face, skype, telephone, email)			8 (regular mentor-mentee exchange, sharing of knowledge, practice and networks)
	Medium (learning exchange –telephone & email)		6 (mentor-mentee exchange focused mainly on current practices of mentor/organisation, some career guidance)	
	Low (Less than 1 hour of learning exchange – email & telephone)	7 (introductory conversation; exchange of information on mentor's practice and mentee's study/expectations) 2 (only first introductory email exchange)		
		Initiation (initial contact & aim to establish rapport)	Direction (build rapport and agree direction)	Maturation (cultivation of effective mentor-mentee conversations)
Evolution of mentoring relationship				

It appears that Hamilton & Scandura's (2003) emphasis on the importance of the initial phase of the development of 'electronic chemistry' is confirmed by the above finding. There is clear evidence that an e-mentoring relationship will be achieved not just through computer literacy but also through the ability to personalise and emotionalise the media; a lot of commitment and patience is required from both mentor and mentee to move through the phases of the

relationship. Where the mentor and mentee invested the time and engaged in building the rapport ie first, demonstrated commitment, interest and enthusiasm in the mentoring relationship and second, where meaningful learning exchange occurred the relationship progressed to ‘maturity’. With others the lack of initial effort to firstly communicate and then to manage expectations of each other prevented further engagement. Here, as mentioned earlier, the development and progress of individual mentor-mentee pairs who had the opportunity for one face-to-face meeting (3 pairs) and a mentor and mentee who did not have any face-to-face meeting, but used video skyping as their main mode of e communication appears to be very similar. As one mentee recalled, “*seeing and talking to my mentor on skype felt the same as meeting him in person, he was so engaging....*”. Therefore, this study highlights that the use of ‘video skyping’ in e-mentoring can overcome the loss of visual cues such as body language and facial expressions which may pose a challenge to virtual intimacy (Bierema & Merrian, 2002; Ensher et al, 2003; Bierema & Hill, 2005; Zey, 2011).

Another factor influencing the e-mentoring relationship alongside rapport building is the having a high clarity of purpose (Clutterbuck 2001) during each mentoring exchange or as an overall outcome of the intervention. Both mentors and mentees were asked to identify their level of ‘rapport’ and ‘clarity of purpose’. The analyses of the responses from the questionnaires and the interviews revealed that 8 relationships achieved both high rapport and high clarity. These mentorship conversations were regular, with mentors providing insights into practice and sharing experiences which enhanced the learning of the mentees and therefore optimum learning was achieved. These are the same pairs who reached the maturity stage in the evolution of the mentoring relationship. In the 4 relationships that reached high rapport but had low clarity of purpose, the mentees benefitted from the mentor guidance and support, but conversations could have been more structured with specific outcomes. Here, the mentee needed to take the driving seat and manage responsibility for their own development (Allen & Eby, 2007; Clutterbuck 2011).

In contrast, 5 relationships appeared to have high clarity of purpose but failed to build the rapport as both parties may have been more task than relationship focused. Finally, the 6 relationships who confirmed low rapport & low clarity of purpose seemed to be going through the motions without the engagement and commitment required for the process to be successful. Figure 2 presents some responses from mentees and mentors as examples to demonstrate the level of clarity of purpose and rapport building.

Figure 2: Clarity of purpose and rapport in relationships (adapted from Clutterbuck, 2001)

Exemplary responses from mentors and mentees			
	High clarity of purpose		
Low Rapport	<p>*(5)</p> <p><i>‘I wanted to find out about Talent Management but struggled to ask questions’ (Mentee)</i></p> <p><i>‘I asked him to work on a job profile, no response’ (Mentee)</i></p>	<p>(8)</p> <p><i>‘open and structured discussions which was very good’ (Mentor)</i></p> <p><i>‘goals of mentoring agreed – overall and per session which worked well’ (Mentee)</i></p> <p><i>‘I prepared in advance to make the most of it’ (Mentee)</i></p> <p><i>‘keen to learning and progress’ (Mentor)</i></p>	High rapport
	<p>(6)</p> <p><i>‘difficult to arrange convenient time for both’ (Mentee)</i></p> <p><i>‘no response from several emails’ (Mentee)</i></p> <p><i>‘mentee did not engage’ (Mentor)</i></p> <p><i>‘it is unclear what she wants to talk about’ (Mentor)</i></p>	<p>(4)</p> <p><i>‘very interesting to find out about general HR issues in organisation’ (Mentee)</i></p> <p><i>‘it was amazing to speak to such a senior global manager; not sure what to ask’ (Mentee)</i></p> <p><i>‘good conversation but not sure what the mentee wants to achieve’ (Mentor)</i></p>	
	Low clarity of purpose		

*The numbers in bracket () represents the number of mentor-mentee relationships in each of these quadrants in this study

A senior HR manager from the construction development industry who was paired with a Human Resource Management Masters student demonstrated high 'rapport' and 'high clarity of purpose' saying,

I think it was a mutual learning experience and I will rate it as highly evolved. We had quite a few sharing conversations including the way we work in Real Estate Industry. We also shared some existing learning on HR processes e.g. Recruitment Process & Policy, JD (job description),...Manpower Requisition Form, Interview Assessment Sheet, Sample Appointment Letter. I also shared a Best People Practices report and some leadership lessons linked to her last project on "my personal position on leadership and management development... I hope she is a better equipped HR post graduate now.

On the other hand, one mentor who struggled to offer support to his mentee, demonstrating low 'rapport' and low 'clarity of purpose' commented,

Currently the mentee is not serious in the discussion as during my first conversation I had provided him some task to understand his calibre at a basic organizational level i.e. the task was to define some specific JD(job description) for Hotel managementno response from him.

The need for mentors and mentees to assume mutual responsibility for the success of the relationship and for the mentee to be willing to commit to reflective practice and personal growth which has been strongly advocated by Bierema & Hill (2005) is confirmed through these findings. The eight mentor-mentee pairs who moved through the evolution of the mentoring relationship to 'maturity' (Fig 1), through regular exchanges, sharing of experiences, views and stories (Jones, 2013) also falls in high rapport-high clarity of purpose quadrant (Fig 2) which clearly demonstrates that 'intensity of learning' is maximised when rapport and clarity of purpose is high.

Mentoring functions and style

The most frequently adopted style and functions of the group of mentors in this study was analysed using Clutterbuck's (1998) situational mentoring model. Both mentors and mentees were familiar with the model as it was introduced and discussed as a part of the mentor-mentee training. Where the e-mentoring relationship moved beyond the initiation stage (see

Fig 1), the most frequently adopted mentoring style by 16 of the mentors was a combination of coaching and facilitation (Kram, 1983; Clutterbuck, 1998) which demonstrated that the mentor-mentee conversations were intellectually stimulating and sometimes challenging, offering direction for example, career advice and networking opportunities. As one mentor commented, *“the aim was to help them to think for themselves”*. The mentors also demonstrated a facilitative style as they enhanced the mentees’ learning and development by sharing experiences of practices in human resource management.

Some level of counselling which requires a non-directive nurturing approach as well as a guardian-style support which was more directive but still nurturing was offered by 7 of the mentors in this study. They appeared to have strengthened the psychological aspect of the relationship and helped to develop a friendship and build the mentee’s confidence and increase their sense of competence and capability. One mentee clearly articulated this support, *“he took time to explain this complex model on skype, like a teacher, going through the application of it in a way that I was finally able to follow”*. Although the style of mentoring identified in the study does not appear to have any specific link or impact on the development and success of the individual mentor-mentee relationships, the study highlights that overall an effective mentor should be able to challenge as well as offer nurturing support as required within a mentor-mentee relationship.

Mode of communication in E-mentoring

The responses from mentors and mentees confirmed that they mainly used email and telephone for communication; 17 pairs used Skype and 3 pairs had the opportunity for face-to-face communication as these mentors visited the UK during the programme. A key influencing factor highlighted by both mentees and mentors who used skype and who had at least one face-to-face conversation was the power of body language in building their relationship, particularly in the early phase as they were able to build affinity quickly and this, according to them, made it easier to develop a more effective relationship. This empirical evidence confirms that cultivating an e-mentoring relationship may pose challenges if reliant on only non-visual mode of communication (Ensher *et al.*, 2003; Purcell, 2004; Bierema & Hill, 2005). Rapport (or virtual intimacy) may be difficult to create particularly if participants have not met (Clutterbuck 2001, Zay 2011). Interestingly, three of the mentors claimed that where there is commitment and engagement from both parties such barriers can be overcome. Also, the more recent use of online video chat in e mentoring e.g. Skype, where

the mentor and mentee can conduct visual exchanges can be as effective as a face-to-face interaction, as such eliminating the challenges of non-verbal communication in e mentoring.

Contrary to previous literature which identified cost as an issue, both monetary as well as time (Fodeman, 2002; Bierema & Hill, 2005), the responses from of both mentors and mentees in this study confirm that the recent advances and free access to technology e mentoring overall saves both time and resources. The key factor here is the ease with which communication can take place in the virtual world (O'Neil, Wagner & Gomez, 1996; Single & Muller, 2001; Janasz & Godshalk, 2013). This empirical evidence confirms that advances in technology and acceptance of e-communication have indeed opened up possibilities of global mentoring relationships allowing the mentor and mentee to be in different places and different time zones (Zay, 2011; Scandura & Hamilton, 2003; Bierema & Merriam, 2002; Clutterbuck, 2001). However, both mentors and mentees acknowledged that time and commitment was still required to set up and undertake the mentoring conversations.

Barriers of e-mentoring

In considering some of the challenges of virtual mentoring identified in the literature, this scheme offered a systemic and structured approach with effective training and support for mentors and mentees (Ensher *et al.*, 2003; Bierema & Hill, 2005). The scheme provided comprehensive training on the aims and objectives of the scheme as well as to established common appreciation of the skills and behaviours that contributes to a successful mentor-mentee relationship. In this case, models of mentoring from current literature, as discussed earlier, were used to establish a shared understanding of the process and purpose of this e-mentoring scheme. Support sessions, face-to-face for the mentee and online for the mentors, were provided by the project team throughout the scheme to address any arising issues and to manage the expectations of both mentors and mentees.

However, sustaining some of the 23 mentor-mentee relationships did present challenges (Brown, 2001) and as a part of the summative evaluation of the scheme, participants were asked to identify at least one barrier to e-mentoring. Interestingly, three mentors felt that the scheme provided clear guidance and support and there were no barriers which could not be addressed in co-ordination with the participants and the project team. These mentors had used emails, telephone and skype and two of them had one face-to-face communications with their mentees. However, 77% of the participants, both mentors and mentees, experienced some barriers and difficulty in their chosen method of communication. Some examples of

barriers identified by were the challenges of agreeing mutually convenient time for mentoring conversations due both to the difference in time zone and time constraints of participants. 32% of the participants faced some problems with Skype and telephone connections. Strong commitment of mentors and drive and initiative of the mentees also proved to be a challenge as only 35% of the mentor-mentee relationships reached the 'maturity' stage in this study. Therefore, the study confirms that the challenges of using online technologies (Ensher *et al.*, 2003; Bierema & Hill, 2005) and the commitment and motivation (DiRenzo *et al.*, 2009) required for successful involvement in e-mentoring is an important consideration in developing GMRs.

E-mentoring as a HRD intervention for learning and career development in Higher Education

The e-mentoring scheme gave the mentees an opportunity to learn about organisational practices, particularly human resource management in an international context as well as improve and enhance their career development. 83% of the participants agreed that e-mentoring provided a useful opportunity for learning. The mentees who moved beyond the rapport building stage said that their mentors provided insight into the world of work which enabled them to relate theories learnt during their post-graduate study to human resource (HR) practices in an organisational context. The topics discussed in their mentoring conversations included recruitment, pay roll, employee engagement, leadership development, talent management, coaching, organisational culture, cross cultural management, performance management and how HR initiatives aligned to organisational strategies in practice. One mentee comment demonstrates this learning clearly:

The scheme is highly educational and a great help to improve HR practitioner skills. My mentor is extremely supportive and has been encouraging. He has motivated me to do further research and reading. Conversing with him enables me to relate my learning of HR with his organisation.

Seven mentees specifically referred to enhancement of soft skills such as effective communication and confidence building through the e-mentoring process. Four mentees were offered opportunities for networking and guidance on career development with options for work experience and placement both in India and the UK. One mentee who set up a recruitment agency in India said: *"This scheme has helped me develop a rapport with a*

professional at a senior level. Networking opportunities were extremely wonderful. Plus, yes, the conversations have helped me in my career development process.”

Another mentee who secured a HR role in a UK multinational company attributed this success to the career guidance received from the mentor:

Yes for me the experience has been worthwhile and we are still in touch. On and off I used to ask him questions about what my plan of action should be so yes, he was helpful in guiding me to select action plan for my new career in HR.

Therefore, the study suggests that e-mentoring as a HRD intervention can support learning and career development for those mentees who are successful in establishing an effective GMRs.

Implications for Theory

This study contributes to empirical research on e-mentoring, particularly in an inter-organisational context as the findings provides evidence based practice that advances in technology and embracement of e-communication have indeed opened up possibilities of Global Mentoring Relationships (GMRs) allowing the mentor and mentee to be geographically separated (Zay, 2011; Scandura & Hamilton, 2003; Ensher *et al*, 2003; Bierema & Merriam, 2002; Clutterbuck, 2001). The findings also confirm that models and frameworks on stages, styles and success of mentoring which have been mainly applied to traditional mentoring is equally applicable to e-mentoring. The commitment and motivation to use e-communication to build rapport and establish clarity of purpose, both by the mentor and mentee can enable the GMRs to successfully move through the phases of the relationship to the level of maturity where the intensity of learning is most effective. This was achieved by the eight GMRs (see Figures 1 & 2) in this study. The study, therefore offers empirical evidence to confirm that e-mentoring in an international and intra-organisational context can be highly effective in enhancing learning and providing opportunities for career development (Dreher & Cox, 1996; Bireme & Merriam, 2002; Bierema & Hill 2005; Headlam-Wells, Gosland and Craig, 2005; de Janasz, & Godshalk, 2013) if the factors affecting the evolution of the mentoring relationship are addressed and barriers to e-mentoring are removed as identified in this study.

Implication for practice - key considerations for HRD practitioners in implementing e-mentoring

Although learning is becoming progressively more virtual in our high technology, globalizing knowledge society and e-mentoring holds great promise for a low cost, high impact career development tool that spans the globe and provides access to the diverse workplace (Bierema and Hill, 2005), the empirical evidence from this study suggest that challenges and barriers identified need to be considered in devising e-mentoring as an effective learning intervention. The sustainability and success of the e-mentoring relationship will need to be managed by HRD professionals to ensure that learning can be maximised through the e-medium. In this study, a key influencing factor in the success of the e mentoring relationships was virtual intimacy through use of video skyping and in the case of a few, one face-to-face meeting. Therefore, initially facilitating the opportunity to develop a mentoring relationship in person (Purcell 2004) or through video skyping conversations should be considered where possible to ensure visual cues can be exchanged as a part of the rapport building process between a mentor and a mentee. Multiple methods of communication rather than only online solutions are likely to maximise learning and achieve programme outcomes. However, an online mentoring programme, for example, accessed through a website may address the issue of widely varying technologies which raises the risk of compatibility and reliability of e-communication, particularly within an inter-organisational scheme as presented in this study.

Another consideration is the differing expectations with regard to turnaround time and frequency of interactions, which has also been highlighted as a major problem in previous studies on e-mentoring (Harris, 1996; DiRenzo et al., 2009). When the distances span time zones it is likely that these periods may become longer with exchanges being asynchronous. An email message from a mentee can get buried in the inbox and is easier to ignore than the mentee who is in the office for a face-to-face conversation. Also, the mentor's own organisational priorities can sometimes outweigh the voluntary mentoring role and this can also create a threat to a relationship. This study shows that gaps in frequency of exchanges contributed significantly to the pace of rapport building, particularly at the initial stage. Also, the level of clarity of purpose of the mentoring relationship had a direct impact on managing expectations of both mentors and mentees. Here, clear structure and processes and on-going support within the e-mentoring scheme can help to address and manage these challenges. Therefore, HRD practitioners need to recognise that once the physical distance exceeds a point which renders e-mentoring necessary, the demands upon those involved in implementation of such schemes may escalate rapidly too. The level of co-ordination provided to build, nurture and monitor the mentor-mentee relationships needs to be balanced

and managed carefully to ensure that the relationships evolve through the mentoring phases presented in this study.

Implications for further research

First, our study was undertaken during the life of the scheme and final feedback was collated four months after the formal conclusion of the relationships. We fully accept that career development outcomes are often more long term than the time period of this study. Attempts were made to maintain contacts with all the mentees to track their long term career progression; over the recent 12 months, we have been able to track career progression of only 4 of the mentees on this scheme; they have all attributed their success to the mentoring support they received through this scheme. Further longitudinal studies which would track the progress of the mentees for a span of their career would be a promising area for further research, although it must be acknowledged that it may be difficult to isolate mentoring from other factors influencing careers success over a longer period of time.

Second, this e-mentoring study only involved a limited number of participants across two dispersed geographical areas in the context of higher education. We recommend that the constructs used in this study are applied more widely involving a larger number of participants across more geographical areas and where possible at inter-organisational as well as intra-organisational levels in a variety of sectors. The third area for research is comparative or multi case studies of traditional mentoring and e-mentoring. Finally, the diversity or multi-cultural aspect GMRs and how this affects learning and career development of participants is another area for consideration.

Conclusion

Overall, the study highlights that high rapport and clarity of purpose are the key drivers (i.e success factors) in all mentoring relationships, including GMRs; this implies that trust and mutual confidence are necessary basis for a successful learning relationship (Clutterbuck 2001, Klasen & Clutterbuck 2002). Within developmental mentoring the main responsibility for the relationships lies with the mentee. They should drive the association, set meetings and define the agenda.

Some mentoring relationships may not work for many reasons. The study shows that this could be because of failure to build rapport, no clear goal setting or agenda, lack of

confidence, because of limited commitment by either party or the mentee feeling that a particular mentor is unable to meet his or her needs.

Finally, unlike in-house mentoring and other online e-mentoring programmes, as this was an inter-organisational scheme with mentors recruited from a range of different industry sectors with varying organisational ethos, structure and processes, the mentors required a particular level of skill which was less about simply downloading from a reservoir of tacit organisational knowledge by the more experienced to the less experienced; but it was more about sharing organisational knowledge and personal experiences as a senior HR practitioner with years of experience, to ensure that any guidance to the mentee was a response to the mentee's identified needs.

Therefore, this study offers an example of a unique learning exchange through e-mentoring to build, capture and share knowledge (Bierema & Hill, 2005) between a mentor and a mentee in a GMR. Continued research is needed to fully understand the potential as well as the drawbacks associated with e-mentoring and GMRs.

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